

## Musical Theme Between Paraphrasing, Variation, and Quoting

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**Abstract:** *The idea of repeating musical themes in various configurations is a technique practiced since ancient times and is still valid today. Recognizing the ways of the motivic transformation and identifying the type of intervention on a work (paraphrasing, or quotation) reveals not only the composition process of the author but also makes possible the aesthetic description of the musical content. The learning objectives (like many disciplines) have undergone changes in the digital context of the pandemic year, so the main goal in the elaboration of specialized courses is maintaining students' interest in music and especially encouraging their analytical introspection of scores and musical auditions.*

**Key words:** *musical theme; motivic transformation; paraphrasing; analyse.*

The challenge faced by education during the pandemic has brought a specific latent introverted motion, with closed video cameras, direct questions without answers or delayed ones, the presence of the feeling that you are talking alone due to frequent interruptions caused by the poor network signal or due to the absence of the attendants from various reasons such as, the quest of the students for finding new jobs or as parents they had to supervise their children during the online learning. The mental exhaustion and the feeling of frustration led to a state of panic, which fortunately for my students and I gave us an impulse to search for solution in order to resuscitate and arouse their interest in the content of disciplines. The aim was to transform the course into a type of debate by including some new extracurricular topics, which in the end would encourage students to do more individual research along with a responsible exploration of the Internet not only for applications but also for analytical listening. Another challenge for high vocational education remains the mass of specialized knowledge. The difference between those based on advanced music studies (from music schools and high schools) and those with only general knowledge (in some cases) has been deepened in online education. Therefore, this component was an additional reason to catch everyone's attention and interest in listening and analysis.

The main objectives of the Musical Forms and Analysis class are the following: getting a good perception, understanding and interpretation at the morphological and



syntactic level of some musical works, as well as the forming of structural musical thinking and the decoding of some specific architectural configurations.

The knowledge of some concepts related to the style and composition techniques of the work supposes cognitive understanding, process that actually defines the educational act.

Identifying a musical motif or theme and recognizing the transformed and repeated hypostases in a musical work (through various thematic processing, specific to the counterpoint techniques, thematic or the new modern orientations, which not only processes but also inserts or quote themes or motifs in other works) represents in a certain context, the substance of music - *materials of music* – (Bent and Pople, *Analysis*, p. 34) as Deryck Cook argues in his work *The Language of Music* (1959). Also, it is considered that the investigation of the thematic phenomenon leads to revealing the process of composition that oscillates between consciousness and the subconscious.

The use of Internet in the last year, almost exclusively, as the main means of communication and information highlights two aspects, a positive one and a negative one. Although it provides us with a considerable amount of data, videos, scores, extremely clear and attractive examples, it, however, fails to activate cognitive processes similar to classroom learning activities. This theory is supported by many specialists in education and neuroscience, including Manfred Spitzer, who presents in his book *Digital Dementia* the result of a study that evaluates the influence of the type of learning on subsequent knowledge. The results of the experiments show that „the ability to process acquired content depends on how it was assimilated” (Spitzer, 2020, p. 154-155). In other words, whoever gets to know an object through its own analysis, „by manipulating the object, manages much faster than the one who has an abstract knowledge” (Spitzer, 2020, p. 154-155).

Therefore, we understand that no matter how easy, and versatile the technological means or media are, they can be useful at most in an early stage of learning, that is, probably, based on observation only. Knowledge involves cognitive processes and leads to the development of skills, abilities and creative thinking is certainly possible based on individual experiences and probably on a series of interactions between the learner and the teacher. I think that the most eloquent example of learning is the study of a musical instrument that goes through several stages, and although generalized, they are reflected individually depending on the degree of assimilation of the student. Three stages of learning for performance are described by Paul Fitts and Michael Posner (Harper-Scott and Samson, 2009, p. 69) as follows:

1. *The cognitive stage* which is an initial phase and requires a conscious attention
2. *The associative stage* that has a phase of variable duration time in which the learning activity is clarified
3. *The autonomous stage* is definitely the last, where all knowledge develops and evolves automatically without the need for conscious attention.



The long period of online learning, which was prolonged with more than one year, has deprived a number of young musicians in their formation not only as individuals, but also as part of a group. These experiences are required for the development of some specific sense characteristic to his/her profession.

They can be developed only in an educational content and also, in certain environments particularly for their activities (classrooms with acoustic instruments necessary for ear training, study, choir singing, orchestra rehearsals, and having a real experience with the stage and the acoustic of a concert hall).

To the learning process mentioned above, I would add another stage: the capturing of attention and reviving the interest for learning. In terms of university education, this phase may seem childish, but during the lockdown period, the enrichment or the renewal of the curriculum became one of the main coordinates to keep the students' interest in study alive. Therefore, throughout this challenging period of educational context, maintaining the interest in the learning process of the students becomes a much more intense and diverse activity from the content point of view.

A well-known pedagogue from the music education domain is the one who implemented the method that bears his name: Suzuki Shin'ichi. He considered that the ability to learn music or a musical instrument is similar to that of learning the mother language, being, therefore, a present and functional component in any child "All children, without exception, flourish in response to skilful teaching. They are born equipped with that potential" (Suzuki, 2012, p. 8).

Learning a language, either native or foreign, is based on four types of abilities in order to determine language proficiency: *listening, reading, speaking and writing*. By analogy, these same criteria are essential in the study of music. *Listening* is a fundamental component, without which we cannot penetrate the mysteries of music. *Reading* is the stage of deciphering, decoding scores. *Speaking* is the equivalent of singing (vocal or instrumental) and *Writing* is similar to writing scores or composing, which means a more elaborate stage in learning music.

Regarding certain theoretical disciplines as well as the study of a foreign language, it is not wrong to approach a learning strategy inspired by this field.

Starting from these premises, I am giving below some examples of musical works used as strategic examples in learning and understanding a musical concept in musical forms and analyses, respectively the musical idea, motifs, or theme.

The first example is the Bachian theme of *Fugue no 2 in C minor* (the objective being the analysis of some fugues from *Das Wohltemperierte Klavier* - a good example that similarly supports passive and active learning:

Listening to a musical work in online teaching involves either performing it on the piano by the teacher or listening to a score-video on YouTube, the focus being on identifying and specifying each repetition of the theme (first time, only the subject – in initial key, second time, the theme as a subject and answer). The third audition of



the fugue is with a video example that has been already analysed and each theme was being marked with a distinctive colour. The perception of these examples seems easy and often logical. The last audition requires the student to go through his own score accompanied by the video example. Following the theme in various voices required this time a much greater effort from students. As I mentioned above, beyond the difficulty of learning in an online context, the difference deepened even more between those with previous specialized knowledge and those with basic knowledge. And especially, the interest in understanding a thematic labyrinth fades when for various reasons, the content cannot be cognitively assimilated and the teacher could not hear the questions or see the student's reaction.

If a fugue by J. S. Bach is of interest (unfortunately) only to a certain percentage of students, then perhaps a classic Rondo will be more acceptable. This experiment was a success. A rondo is probably easy to listen to in general (by returning the refrain) and secondly, the first musical example presented was a modern version performed by Phil Collins. I am referring to *A Groovy Kind of Love*, a song inspired by the *Sonata no. 5 op. 36* by M. Clementi, more precisely, the refrain of this rondo. The first modern version of this theme was written in 1965 for the duo *Diane and Annita* and a year later, *The Mindbenders* (1966) presented a rock version. But it is the version of Phil Collins (1988) that turns the work into a successful piece in the UK and US charts and wins a Grammy Award at the *Best Pop Vocal* category. Collins' version is perhaps the closest stylistically to Clementi's rondo because, since the beginning of the song, the soloist's voice is accompanied by piano, in a tempo appropriate to the ballad style, keeping the binary metric pulsation and also the original key, and transposing to a higher key in the second part of the song. Even the refrain alternates between a vocal version and an instrumental one (piano). Therefore, the similarity between the two works is extremely strong.

British singer Annie Lennox the founder of the *Eurythmics* band, launched a very touching song at the end of 2020. *When I am laid in earth*, an aria from the opera *Dido and Aeneas* by H. Purcell is a work that has not lost popularity, and it is often sung in Great Britain, in various arrangements, especially on the occasion of specific events, on the Sunday closest to November 11 (Armistice Day). The various modern arrangements and adaptations, some of them even notable, such as the one made by Imogen Holst and Benjamin Britten or the choreographic version signed by Mark Morris, do not restrain the continuous vision of this work.

Annie Lennox's emotional version is more dramatic, as the author interprets in a contralto voice a theme that has often been sung by sopranos. The original key is G minor, and the one in Annie Lennox's version is in B minor.

The recitative is omitted (accompanied by continuous bass). The chromatic motif of a descending fourth (5 bars) becomes an ostinato called *ground bass* and is played by the piano. The theme of the lament of 9 bars - in leaps - contains a melodic climax, strong intervals such as the ascending of the perfect fourth (B flat – E flat) and the



descending interval of diminished fifth (E flat – A). The short repetitive motif - *remember me* culminates with a dramatic upward leap of the perfect fourth.

The main objective to be pursued in this musical work was to understand the concept of thematic idea, its construction and its various transformations (remembering the descending chromatic line and identifying it at each appearance, or the lamentation theme that appears first solo, then is accompanied by the chorus or is sung only by the choir).

Beethoven's works have often been taken over, quoted, or used as part of the soundtrack of films. Sometimes, the themes are used with symbolic value (the choral theme from the last movement of *The Ninth Symphony*), but other times we hear them with a different arrangement or in a different style, as the rap version of the singer Nas which is performed almost entirely on a background inspired by Beethoven's *Für Elise*.

A recent and very interesting example is the jazz version of Beethoven's *Pathétique Piano sonata* (movements two and three) performed by duo Teodora Enache Brody (singer) and Călin Grigoriu (guitar) on December 17th, 2020, in a representation with the occasion of the 250th anniversary of the composer's birth, this being a project presented by the Romanian Cultural Institute from Berlin.

This musical work was listened to by the students and after was followed by an audio-video example of the original score (by Beethoven). In the jazz version, the students noticed that the performance of Teodora Enache was in the original key (A flat major for the second movement and C minor for the third movement). Listening to the two interpretations through frequent comparisons, the students easily noticed both the hypostasis of the refrain (which in Teodora's version shows a timbral change, the theme being played vocally, accompanied by a guitar), and the rhythmical, timbral and stylistic variations introduced in couplets.

Another example is the British singer and composer Sting whose passion for classical music (exploring the music of the 16th century from Dowland - until that of the 20th century – as Prokofiev) brought him numerous international awards and recognitions. But perhaps one of the most beautiful appreciations, as some experts have stated, is that Sting believes that the main source of inspiration for pop music is Renaissance music (Armstrong 2021). In the album entitled *Songs from the Labyrinth*, Sting takes madrigals from John Dowland's compositions and performs them in a new, more simplistic arrangement, a duo with voice and lute. The students followed the score and listened this example by comparison with a choral version (four voices) performed by *Il Canto D'Arione Choir*.

Also, the name of another modern composer, who unfortunately is no more among us, needs to be mentioned is Chick Corea. A versatile, original jazz composer with many examples of works in which he explored various musical styles, paraphrased works from classical music even composed classical works: *Piano concerto*, *Septet*



for winds, strings and piano (1983), *Spain for piano sextet and full symphony orchestra* and performed it in 1999 with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, *String Quartet no. 1*, or explores both improvising and performing concertos with Bobby Mc Ferrin in *The Mozart Sessions*, which includes recordings of Mozart's *Piano Concertos No. 20 in D minor, K. 466*, and *No.23 in A Major, K.488*, performed with *The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra*. *The Mozart Sessions* was released in October 1996.

In an interview for the *BBC Music Magazine*, Chick Corea mentions the influence of his piano teacher (a concert pianist) Salvatore Sullo, who introduced him to the wonderful world of classics, discovering Bach, Mozart, Scarlatti, Beethoven, Chopin, Bartók, Stravinsky, Scriabin, and many others.

The paraphrased example selected for the class is the second movement of *Piano sonata K. 332 in F major* by Mozart (we followed the score, and we listened to Corea's example comparing both versions).

In this work, preceded by an improvisational introduction specific to the author (approx. 30 second), Corea improvises discreetly only in the melodic plan of the work, sometimes at the ornamental level - by adding formulas of embroidery, turns, trills, appoggiatura, échappée - (not far from Mozartian style) or other times completing some figures with thirds, arpeggios or melodic notes and developing a formula as if it were an instrumental cadence.

And because I mentioned Mozart, who along with Beethoven were known since their time for their extraordinary abilities to improvise, the idea of taking a theme and transforming it or quoting it in another work has existed before the Classical period; Bach and other predecessors are notable examples in the history of music for their improvisational performances.

Let us take for example Mozart with his "Non piu andrai" the air from *The Marriage of Figaro* whose theme was taken and quoted with a comic sense in the opera *Don Giovanni* and announced and sung by the character Leporello *Questa poi la conosco pur troppo - Now that tune I know too well*. Moreover, the composer George Crumb cannot be omitted, especially because of his avant-garde works. To be more specific, his *Makrokosmos* refers by title to the work *Mikrokosmos* by B. Bartók and through various forms of expression of musical language paraphrases Frédéric Chopin or Robert Schumann (*Dream Images* where it's quote Largo from *Fantasy in C# minor* by Frédéric Chopin).

The intention of this study is not to display a list of works inspired by classical music, but a pretext to present ways of reviving the interest and attention of students who may often be bored, tired of the amount of information, device screens, or maybe even the lack of adequate space for learning (classroom, library). By presenting musical works that are used as an instrument and as an additional teaching resource in understanding a concept (a thematic concept), it can sometimes be an extra motivation



for students to take a more serious approach to the discipline or why not, it can generate inspiration for their various artistic interests or scientific research.

The teacher's presence and mentoring in the education of the new generations of musicians or music teachers cannot be replaced (nor should it be) by the multitude of examples and videos on the Internet. The problem is not the existence of these materials, some of them being very well made, documented and developed by prestigious specialists in the field, but the risk that students consider this approach extremely effective and satisfactory, and even view them as a reasonable substitution to teachers. A first conclusion would be self-sufficiency and even the destruct of their educational path. The teacher-student relationship is based on, among other things, a cognitive process, and any alteration of this relationship that prevents the development of thinking and creativity will inevitably lead to a sub-academic level of education with long-term negative consequences for our society.

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